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C O N F I D E N T I A L ADDIS ABABA 003803

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/08/2015

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SUBJECT: AU KONARE'S POTENTIAL BREAKTHROUGH ON ETHIOPIAN
INTERNAL POLITICAL CRISIS

Classified By: CHARGE D'AFFAIRES A.I. VICKI HUDDLESTON. REASON: 1.4 (B)
AND (D)

1. (C) Summary: African Union (AU) Commission Chairperson Konare claims that Ethiopian PM Meles accepted his proposal of dialoguing with opposition members without the precondition of their first joining Parliament. Konare said that AU Assembly Chairman Obasanjo told Meles that he was willing to meet with jailed opposition leaders in Addis Ababa. End summary.

AU BREAKTHROUGH?

2. (C) During a November 8 meeting, Konare briefed Charge on the outcome of his lengthy and "frank" November 3 discussions with PM Meles (Note: Konare first met with Meles in his office and then accompanied Meles on his flight to a conference in Germany. End note). Konare told Charge that Meles was "very clear" in his acceptance of his proposal that dialogue commence even without the precondition of opposition members joining Parliament. (Comment: If accurate, Konare's report represents a significant shift in the PM's position. PM Meles has consistently told the troika (U.S., EC, UK) that CUD officials must first take their seats in parliament before any dialogue is possible. End Comment).

3. (C) In addition, Konare said, AU Assembly Chairman Obasanjo also offered to meet with the opposition in Addis Ababa.

STILL NO MOVEMENT ON TRIBUNAL

4. (C) Konare lamented that he and Meles did not see eye-to-eye on the issue of tribunals for the jailed CUD leaders. According to Konare, Meles insisted that Ethiopian law is clear that the trials must go on. Konare agreed with Meles that there can be no "rose revolution" in Ethiopia. Konare said he told Meles that proceeding with the tribunals will only lead to martyrdom of the CUD leaders and drive the party into clandestinity. He urged Meles to delay trial of the detainees.

WHAT DOES IT TAKE?

5. (C) Konare said he has met not only with PM Meles, but also with Ethiopian civil society and women's groups. Konare prevailed upon his Ethiopian interlocutors to resolve issues peacefully. He opined that the CUD's calling for a seemingly endless strike is a political mistake as Ethiopians live day-to-day and cannot afford the consequences of a prolonged strike. In addition, Konare told Meles he must get the situation back to normal because the most affected area of town (Mercato) is largely Muslim, and prolonged tension is a "disaster in the making."

6. (C) Konare acknowledged that the CUD's hands may be somewhat tied due to its dependence upon the Ethiopian diaspora for financial backing. This must be changed, he said, as the diaspora are not subject to the risks. Charge pointed out that the UEDF lost their diaspora-provided funding when they decided to go to parliament. Konare said he told Meles that not funding civil society groups before the election was a mistake. Civil society is part and parcel of democracy, Konare noted, and these groups are now overly dependent upon the diaspora. Konare said that he urged Meles to not follow in the footsteps of former Ethiopian leader Mengistu, whom history has condemned. Rather, he encouraged Meles to build on the nationalism of Haile Selassie, who, while feudal, at least created a sense of nationhood.

7. (C) The AU Chairperson told Charge that he wants the government to wait on trying the opposition leaders, cease night arrests, build civil society, and engage in dialogue with the opposition. Konare said he believes the opposition needs to understand the value of respecting rule of law,

engaging in dialogue, and avoiding confrontation. Charge agreed with Konare that dialogue is key to resolving the internal political crisis, and said she would call for an appointment with the PM to follow up on Konare's good message.

HUDDLESTON